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THE MURIA AND THEIR GHOTUL

883 In some places there is a boy called Pargana Manjhi who exercises the same functions as that official actually does in the life of the tribe. Normally, however, appeals against the decisions of the ghotul leaders go to some older man who has retained his association with the ghotul for that very purpose.

The girl leader is generally appointed by the older boys in consultation with the Kotwar and the motiari. This is an entirely informal matter, there is no election, there is rarely a dispute. In some places the ghotul 'wife' of the leading boy becomes the head of the girls, especially in those ghotul where the girls' names are the same as those of the boys. Thus, where the Diwan is the head of the boys the Diwanin will lead the girls. In those villages where the Gaita's son has the right to leadership of the boys, the Gaita's daughter has a similar privilege among the girls.

The actual ceremony of appointment of a Belosa is similar to that of a Sirdar or Diwan but omits, of course, the tying of a turban. The elders say to the girl, 'Greet the boys with Johar, give them tobacco, comb their hair, massage their limbs, keep the ghotul clean, look after the younger girls, see there is no scandal; this is your responsibility and charge'.

IV

863 In some villages, specially in those of the north-west (in the Kalpatti-Bandadesh and Paralkot-Kalpatti Parganas) there is a rule that the son of the village 551 Gaita must be the head of the ghotul. Thus in Koilibera and Barkot I found that the Gaita's son ranked, even when he was a little boy, above the son of the Pargana Manjhi and this boy or some other relative of the Gaita was always the head of the ghotul. In Sarandi the son of the Dhurwa and in Padbera the son of the Manjhi were the leaders of their ghotul. The head of the Barkot ghotul was called Gaita and was the Gaita's son. The head of the Mannegaon ghotul was also called Gaita and the post was held by the son of Kandru, the Gaita of that village. In a Ghotul Pata recorded at Markabera, the village Gaita's son is leader of the chelik and the Gaita's daughter leader of the motiari.

883 But in other villages throughout the whole Muria area such an idea is unheard of and, when I have suggested it, has been indignantly rejected. The 183 only leadership is that of character; the whole principle of the ghotul, I have been told again and again, is that everyone is equal, rich or poor, the son of priest, headman or landlord, all are one in this fellowship which knows no wealth-distinction or privilege of inherited rank. And this, I think, is true. The Muria belief in equality is often carried to quite fantastic lengths. If work is demanded from a village by the Government, every family contributes the same amount. If in any ghotul all the boys have titles and there are thus no probationers to bring wood in the evenings, all the boys go together to fetch wood in a cart; each cuts exactly the same quantity and all bring the wood home. If one boy is not able to be present, they postpone the task till another day. If the village gets any present it must be exactly distributed and at feasts exact measurements are made of parched rice, meat or liquor. The Muria of Chandabera said that 'if one of our tribe were to pile up heaps of gold before us, we would still say "O, he is only a relation; our sons can marry his daughters"', and in Phunder the headman said, 'Of all the good things our children learn in the ghotul, one of the best is that everyone is equal'. In Phulpar, the leader was the son of the Atpariha or village drudge. At Chandabera, the Kotwar was deformed; at Bhanpuri, the Daroga was blind. Both had important duties and every privilege.

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even her kicks are sweet.' A study of ghotul offences and the type of punishment awarded, therefore, may be expected to throw some light on Muria notions of morality and the inner life of chelik and motiari.

Their offences, of course, cannot be understood properly except against the background of the general moral and social life of the tribe. To the Muria, as to most aboriginals, tribal solidarity is the supreme good, and anything that breaks this precious unity and fellowship must be condemned. Individualism is the great sin. For this reason, quarrelling and homicide are rare, theft is almost as uncommon. There are few who refuse to share the common work and interests of the community. Adultery is bad, not only because it infringes the rights of another Muria, but because it breaks up the carefully regulated domestic system of the people, and threatens to disrupt it by jealousy and hatred.

We have already seen the stress laid by the Muria on work. Slackness and laziness are very severely regarded, and are the commonest sources of friction between wife and husband. Cleanliness, decency, decorum and modesty are virtues much prized. A quiet and kindly attitude is expected of the tribal leaders; the bully and the coward are equally disliked.

Against this background, what sort of actions are condemned by ghotul opinion and punishable in ghotul law? Let us first consider those actions that are held to betray the common interest. They are doubly important, for in the highly specialized and concentrated fellowship of the ghotul, the general tribal instinct for unity becomes intensified.

II

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Quarrels in the dormitory are strongly condemned. They are disturbing to the peace of ghotul life and specially offensive to so gentle and uncontentious a people. Children are fined for this, and may even be expelled. In Khutgaon there was once a very quarrelsome chelik. After a time, the leaders of the ghotul called him and said, 'Do you want to be in the ghotul or outside it?' The dreaded threat of expulsion brought him to his senses and he gave no more trouble.

The betrayal of the ghotul fellowship by repeating outside anything that happens within its walls, especially any stories of the intimate relations of chelik and motiari or some scandal about a pregnancy, is one of the greatest of ghotul crimes, for 'that which comes from the mouth bears fruit throughout the world'. Once at Gorma, the Kotwar and Belosa revealed to the village that a girl was pregnant; they were expelled and told that they would never be readmitted. Only when they brought a lot of liquor and fell at the feet of each chelik in turn, promising never to offend again, were they allowed to return.

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Ghotul solidarity is constantly emphasized by the use of the ghotul title, and proper names may never be used between members. If a young child forgets this and addresses, say, his elder brother by the name that is always used at home, the others explain the custom to him; but if he offends again, he is punished.

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The dormitory has to be kept clean. Though spitting is permitted, anyone who urinates inside the building is punished. This prohibition extends, in some places, to the court outside. To break wind is not a very serious offence; the children laugh at the offenders and call them *badva* or *badvi*. Only a light punishment is imposed. At Ilaibar the culprit had to salute